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ABSTRACT

The relationship between student characteristics and the frequency with which students left campus on weekends was investigated. Subjects were 411 undergraduate students who completed an 11-item self-report instrument designed to measure the influence of students' class rank, sex, and distance from home on behavior, their reasons for remaining/leaving campus, and the prevalence of the behavior. Class rank had a significant effect on the frequency with which students went home, with freshmen going home the most often and juniors the least. Students living within a 50-mile radius of the campus went home more often than those from any other distance. Women went home significantly more than men. Affiliation-related needs represented three of the top four reasons for leaving campus. Those who did remain on campus cited the need to study or catch up on school work as the principal reason. (Author)

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Weekend Migration: An Investigation of the "Suitcase College" Phenomenon at a Midwestern University

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The "suitcase college" label is familiar to students, faculty, and administrators at colleges and universities throughout the country. Although the term lacks a precise definition, it is generally applied to those institutions where a significant percentage of the student population "pack their suitcases" at the end of each school week, disappear from campus, and return several days later to resume classes. Vacant parking lots, empty lounges, and deserted cafeterias offer mute testimony to the weekend phenomenon.

This readily observable form of student behavior has been neglected in the student personnel literature. Reasons for the omission are uncertain but may be largely due to complexity in the measurement and assessment of such a multi-faceted phenomenon. In addition, campus decision-makers who believe the phenomenon is inconsequential and/or irreversible, may not encourage or initiate relevant research.

The nature and importance of the perceptual, developmental, and behavioral consequences of the phenomenon are based upon personal opinion and informal observation. Cass and Birnbaum (1977) believe that the percentage of students who leave campus on weekends represent an element of "campus life" which can have an effect on students in attendance from several hundred miles away. Weekend migration, too, may have an impact on the sense of community and degree of cohesiveness which exist on campus; environmental assessment instruments, however, have not taken the factor into consideration. Viewed from a developmental perspective, it would appear that remaining on weekends can facilitate an increase in students' emotional and instrumental autonomy (Chickering, 1969); i.e. the student would become more self-sufficient and less dependent upon parents for approval, assurance, and assistance.

There are a limited number of observable and predictable effects at "suitcase colleges". Chief among these are decreased student attendance at

Friday afternoon classes, limited student participation in weekend programs and events, and the resulting frustration experienced by faculty and staff.

If remaining on campus can be identified as a growthful activity, which may produce additional desirable outcomes, then the role of the student development educator is explicit: to design and implement programs which will influence the behavior (Jackson, 1977). Those who are convinced that the phenomenon is unidirectional will be deterred at this juncture. Substantive information on the reversibility of the phenomenon, heretofore absent, is necessary for the validation of such a conviction.

A variety of student characteristics interact with diverse environmental factors to affect the frequency with which students leave campus on weekends. The present study, conducted at a midwestern "suitcase college", was designed to gather descriptive information on the : (1) influence of selected student characteristics (class rank, sex, and distance from home) on the behavior; (2) students' reasons for leaving/remaining on campus; and (3) prevalence of the behavior. A primary objective of the study, to be achieved through examination of the data, was to further explore the reversibility issue and its implications.

METHOD

Participants and Data Collection

Northeast Missouri State University is a public, state-supported, liberal arts institution with an enrollment of 5600 students. It is located in a rural area , in a city of 16,000 residents; the nearest metropolitan area (>100,000 population) is 150 miles distant. The on-campus population of 2800 students is housed in seven single-sex residence halls; freshmen are required to live on campus.

Subjects were drawn from two halls, one female and one male, which

accommodate a cumulative 43% of the resident population. A locally-designed survey was distributed in March, 1979 via student mailboxes, to each resident. Forms were returned either to the mailroom or a Resident Assistant. The population was defined as "on-campus students, from the freshman-senior classes, who are United States citizens with a minimum of one complete semester at NMSU". Surveys were reviewed upon collection and all first-semester students, International students, and graduate students were eliminated from the sample, a procedure which reduced the sample to 900 potential respondents.

A total of 411 usable surveys were collected, a response rate of 45.6%. The sample consisted of 186 freshmen (45.3%), 104 sophomores (25.3%), 85 juniors (20.7%), and 36 seniors (8.7%). Freshmen were slightly underrepresented with sophomores and juniors slightly overrepresented. The 216 females (52.6%) and 195 males (47.4%) closely approximated the distribution in the residence hall population. Subjects were distributed by distance from their home to the university as follows: 0-49 miles (n=33, 8.0%); 50-99 miles (n=126, 30.6%); 100-149 miles (n=66, 16.1%); 150-199 miles (n=66, 16.1%); 200-249 miles (n=83, 20.2%); and over 250 miles (n=37, 9.0%). It was not possible to determine if these frequencies resembled the percentage found in the campus population.

Instrument

An 11-item self-report instrument was designed by the authors for use in the study. Items solicited demographic information such as class rank, sex, and distance from the students' hometown to the university.

Twenty-three (23) weekends, excluding Thanksgiving and the end of Fall Semester, had passed when the survey was conducted. Students were instructed to indicate the number of weekends (1-23) they had been away from campus, operationally defined as "absent from the hall at least 36 consecutive hours anytime between noon Friday and midnight Sunday".

Two items, in checklist form, consisted of commonly cited reasons for leaving/remaining on weekends. Students were instructed to check the three main reasons why they left/remained, or to check fewer if applicable. The responses of students who selected more than three reasons were not tabulated; therefore, sample size for these items was reduced to 377 and 370 students respectively.

RESULTS

Influence of Student Characteristics

Class rank, sex, and distance from home were each treated as independent variables with the number of weekends away as the dependent variable. A series of one-way analyses of variance and two-tailed t-tests were run on the data. Table 1 reports the means, standard deviations, and F-ratios; Tables 2 and 3 report the t-test results for class rank and distance from home.

Class rank had a significant effect ($F=3.34$, $df=410$; $p<.05$) on the frequency with which students went home. Freshmen, who went home more often than any other class ($\bar{X}=10.3$ weekends) differed significantly ($t=2.92$; $p<.01$) from juniors, who went home the least of any class ($\bar{X}=7.9$ weekends). The difference between freshmen and seniors closely approached significance.

A strong linear relationship was observed between a student's distance from home and the number of weekends away from campus ($F=27.89$; $df=410$; $p<.001$). Students who lived within a 50-mile radius of the campus went home more often ($\bar{X}=13.6$ weekends) than those from any other distance; students from beyond 250 miles went home the least ($\bar{X}=4.4$ weekends). Without exception, a significant difference was obtained between all groups separated by 100 miles or more.

Women, all classes combined, went home significantly more often than men ($F=8.82$; $df=410$; $p<.01$).

Reasons for Leaving/Remaining on Campus

Students' reasons for leaving campus are rank-ordered and presented in Table 4, along with a cross-sectional analysis by class rank and sex.

Affiliation-related needs represented three of the top four reasons for leaving campus. The most frequently selected determinant of weekend departures was to "visit family and relatives" (69.2%); sophomore women constituted the highest percentage (82.1%). Overall, women were more likely than men to choose this reason.

To visit with friends (30.8%) and boyfriend/girlfriend (30.2%) were ranked third and fourth. The highest percentage on the former reason was found among freshman males (49.3%), with a notable decline observed in sophomore men. Junior women (40.8%) and senior males (41.7%) were more likely than any other class/sex to select the boyfriend/girlfriend response. Again, a sizable decline was noted between the freshman and sophomore years for men..

The second-ranked reason (41.4%), to "get away from the hall, university, or community environment", is descriptive of an escape-motivated behavior. This statement, consistently selected more often by women than men in the same class, progressively increased in frequency for both sexes, being highest for seniors (men=40.9% and women=58.3%).

"Boredom, nothing to do here", ranked fifth, was cited by 23.6% of the respondents. The figure was lowest for freshman males (14.1%) and females (4.3%) but steadily increased to a peak of 25-30% among juniors and seniors.

It is a common belief at "suitcase colleges" that many students go home on weekends to work; this reason was ranked eighth (11.1%). The percentage of men who chose this item was five times greater than the percentage of women (83% vs 17%). Among those men (n=35) and women (n=7), an equal percentage (67%) specified that they worked for their parents.

Freshman males (18.3%) were the most likely to select "attend a high school event," ranked tenth. This response fell to a low among senior men (4.5%); none of the junior/senior women picked the item.

The "other" reasons specified by respondents for going home included: to do laundry, get "good" food, attend church retreats, and a three-day weekend.

Students' reasons for remaining on campus are rank-ordered and presented in Table 5, along with a cross-sectional analysis by class rank and sex.

To "study, catch up on school work" was the principle reason cited for remaining on campus; it was the leading selection for each of the eight class/sex subgroups. The range on the item was from 50.0% (senior men) to 83.3% (senior women).

Social and recreational interests were evident in the second, third, and fourth ranked reasons. To attend"special events at NMSU" (30.0%) and attendance/participation in other events at NMSU (29.2%) were ranked second and third, respectively. Men more often than women selected the latter reason, a difference which was most pronounced in the junior year (42.1% vs 20.0%). To "party", ranked fourth (21.9%), was most favored by freshman males (36.1%); it was the second-highest ranked item, overall, for that group. A substantial decline occurred after the freshman year and a plateau of 15-18% (among men) was reached.

The influence of peers who attend the university, and their effect on weekend retention, is noticeable as 20.8% of the sample indicated that "friends remained on campus" (ranked fifth) was one reason for staying.

Although 45% of the sample lived more than 150 miles from the university, the distance-related factors, "home is too far away" (16.2%, ranked seventh) and "cost too much money to go home" (15.4%, ranked eighth) were not prominent reasons for remaining on weekends.

Altogether, 9.5% of the students remained on weekends to "work"

(ranked 11th). A sex difference was again noted in relationship to employment, but it was the women who chose this reason more often than the men (71% vs 29%). Junior and senior women (22.5% and 25.0%) were the most likely to select this response. Among the women, 60% (n=15) were employed on campus vs 30% of the men (n=3).

"Other reasons given for remaining included the satisfaction of needs for: (1) privacy: "to have time by myself", "my roommate always goes home and I like the solitude", and "quieter on campus during weekends"; (2) affiliation: "my boyfriend goes here so I stay"; and (3) autonomy: "to adapt to being away from home", and "I like my independence and don't need to go home".

Prevalence

To estimate the percentage of students who leave campus on a weekend, the total number of "student-weekends" was first calculated. This step consisted of a summation of 23 products: the number of weekends away (1-23) multiplied by the frequency (number of students)for each. The "student-weekends" (3866) when divided by the total number of calendar weekends (23), yielded the number of students away on a (mathematically) "average" weekend (168.1). This figure, divided by the sample size (n=411), yielded a quotient of 41% (the percentage of students away on an "average" weekend). Since students exercise some selectivity in their choice of which weekends to go home, e.g. prior to and following a three-day weekend or special school event (Homecoming), sizable deviations may occur from the weekend percentage obtained by this procedure.

DISCUSSION

Longitudinal and cross-sectional studies concerned with the impact of college (Feldman and Newcomb, 1969; Kuh, 1976) have generally found that seniors are more autonomous than freshmen. If remaining on campus during weekends does represent a form of autonomous behavior, as clearly implied

in student comments cited earlier, then the finding that juniors remained on campus more often than freshmen would appear to be consistent with previous research. The data indicate that interest in attending high school events diminishes and students go home less often to see friends as new relationships and interests are formed and developed at the university. Students who remain overly dependent on family, high school friends, and the hometown community for emotional support and personal identity may go home frequently and subsequently not fully realize their developmental potential.

Freshmen who live within 100 miles of the campus merit attention as the most likely group to go home on weekends. Programmatic efforts directed toward this target group should include an added focus on the female population. The operation of a strong affiliational tie between parents and daughter is detectable in the frequency with which women more often than men chose the items "parents want me to come home" and "to visit family". Parental pressure to return home may function as an obstacle in the daughter's developmental processes.

Students often remark, "I won't get any studying done if I go home". Although students in the sample remained on campus primarily to "study", further research is necessary to determine whether those who remain more frequently achieve greater academic success than those who go home; converting intentions into actions can be a difficult task for some. The academic climate of an institution, and the intellectual rigor of various major fields, may have a direct relationship to the number of students who remain on weekends.

Examination of the data reveals variables which meet the double criterion of being : (1) associated with remaining on campus and (2) susceptible to manipulation by student development educators. The positive identification of the factors suggests that weekend migration can be altered if specific strategies and programs are successfully implemented.

A large distance between a student's home and the university is an obvious inhibitor of weekend migration. The availability of transportation, its cost, and lengthy travel time all reduce the probability that those from greater distances will leave campus. Too, students who choose to attend an institution far from home may be more independent, or seeking more independence, than their counterparts from nearby. The deliberate recruitment of students who live beyond a 150 mile radius of the campus could result in a nuclear group to serve as role models for "remaining on campus" behavior.

A circular argument applied to weekend programming follows: no weekend programs→nothing for students to do on weekends→students leave campus→no weekend programs scheduled because few students are present. The present study indicates that special events (such as Homecoming) and other social, recreational, and educational events are strong inducements for students to remain on weekends. This suggests that the programming tautology can be broken through increased, varied, and creative weekend programming. Implementation of the strategy is one active measure which can be directed toward improving the appeal of remaining on campus.

Peer influence is a powerful motivating force which can be utilized to improve weekend retention. As the data implies, students who decide to remain on a weekend may persuade their friends to do the same. Activities and events which produce increased contact between upperclass residents and freshmen, as well as between those from distant homes and those from near campus, may foster interpersonal relationships with a potential effect on weekend-remaining behaviors.

Presses in the college environment may compel students to leave on weekends; the desire to "get away", and the related feeling of boredom, were two factors selected by a large percentage of the sample. Identification of specific referents and phenomenological bases is necessary in order to determine

where to direct appropriate intervention measures. Inconsiderate roommates, lack of privacy, and academic pressures, for example, may be isolated as contributors to the need to get away. It is of paramount importance for an institution to confront the various presses, irrespective of concern for the "suitcase college" phenomenon.

The student population, with its well-recognized financial needs, represents a prime employment pool. The availability of jobs, both on campus and in the community, can have an impact on weekend retention. A shortage of jobs or lack of knowledge about their existence will necessitate that some students return home to work. Creation of, and ample publicity for, a student employment service can help to introduce student job-seekers to potential employers.

The study is not without its limitations. A self-report instrument, by its very nature and design, is subject to potential errors. Item analysis of the survey reveals statements which may be ambiguous or incorporate more than one concept. Certain sample subgroups were numerically small and subdivision into cells further decreased their size. Studies utilizing an experimental design are necessary to provide validation for what are presented here as hypotheses. The authors, aware of these limitations, believe that perhaps the greatest value of the study lies in its heuristic element.

In summation, additional research is needed to determine the significance of the "suitcase college" phenomenon. It appears that weekend retention can be improved, if it is first perceived as a desirable institutional goal; whether the outcome is in reasonable proportion to the effort invested is also a subject for future research. Inactivity, a feeling of hopelessness, and maintenance of the status quo, on the other hand, will insure a university of its continued identity as a "suitcase college".

TABLE 1

Means, Standard Deviations, and F Ratios of Weekends Away for Class Rank, Distance From Home, and Sex

Variable	N	Mean	Standard Deviation	F ratio
Class rank:				
Freshman	186	10.32	6.27	3.34*
Sophomore	104	9.39	6.26	
Junior	85	7.95	6.18	
Senior	36	8.14	6.50	
Distance from home:				
0- 49 miles	33	13.64	7.20	27.89***
50- 99	126	12.37	6.40	
100-149	66	10.77	6.14	
150-199	66	8.15	4.73	
200-249	83	5.36	3.44	
250	37	4.43	3.83	
Sex:				
Male	195	8.44	6.24	8.82**
Female	216	10.28	6.28	

*p < .05

**p < .01

***p < .001

TABLE 2

T Test for the Difference Between Class Rank Means

	Class			
Class	Freshman	Sophomore	Junior	Senior
Freshman				
Sophomore	1.21			
Junior	2.92**	1.59		
Senior	1.86	1.01	.14	

**p< .01

TABLE 3

T Test for the Difference Between Distance From Home Means

	Miles					
Miles	0-49	50-99	100-149	150-199	200-250	>250
0- 49						
50- 99	.94					
100-149	1.98**	1.69				
150-199	3.93***	5.16***	2.73**			
200-250	6.34***	10.24***	6.39***	4.04***		
>250	6.56***	9.28***	6.40***	4.31***	1.23	

**p< .01

***p< .001

TABLE 4

Reasons for Leaving Campus, Distributed by Class Rank and Sex

Reason	All classes (N=377)	Class: Freshman M (n=71)	Freshman F (n=92)	Sophomore M (n=39)	Sophomore F (n=56)	Junior M (n=45)	Junior F (n=40)	Senior M (n=22)	Senior F (n=12)
Visit family and relatives	69.2%	64.8%	71.8%	53.8%	82.1%	68.9%	75.0%	54.5%	75.0%
Get away from environment	41.4%	22.5%	43.5%	33.3%	57.1%	40.0%	52.5%	40.9%	58.3%
Visit with friends	30.8%	49.3%	30.4%	30.8%	32.1%	22.2%	15.0%	31.9%	0.0%
Visit boyfriend/girlfriend	30.2%	40.3%	34.8%	15.4%	26.8%	15.6%	40.8%	18.2%	41.7%
Boredom, nothing to do	23.6%	14.1%	4.3%	25.6%	16.1%	24.4%	30.0%	31.9%	25.0%
Personal business	21.8%	18.3%	19.6%	30.8%	12.5%	31.1%	15.0%	31.9%	25.0%
Special social occasion	17.0%	8.5%	25.0%	12.8%	21.4%	11.1%	15.0%	22.8%	16.7%
Work	11.1%	19.7%	3.3%	28.2%	5.4%	13.3%	2.5%	18.2%	0.0%
Parents want me to come home	10.9%	7.0%	14.1%	20.5%	5.3%	8.9%	17.5%	0.0%	8.3%
Attend high school event	8.5%	18.3%	5.4%	10.3%	8.9%	8.8%	0.0%	4.5%	0.0%
Other	6.4%	8.5%	5.4%	5.1%	8.9%	6.7%	7.5%	4.5%	0.0%
Special recreational occasion	5.6%	11.3%	4.3%	5.1%	5.4%	4.4%	2.5%	4.5%	0.0%
Represent NMSU at events	5.3%	5.6%	4.3%	10.3%	1.8%	6.7%	5.0%	4.5%	8.3%

TABLE 5

Reasons for Remaining on Campus, Distributed by Class Rank and Sex

Reason	All Classes (N=370)	Class: Freshman M (n=72)	Freshman F (n=93)	Sophomore M (n=38)	Sophomore F (n=57)	Junior M (n=38)	Junior F (n=40)	Senior M (n=20)	Senior F (n=12)
Study, catch up on school work	60.3%	58.3%	56.0%	63.1%	52.7%	65.8%	72.5%	50.0%	83.3%
Attend special events at NMSU	30.0	26.4	32.2	31.6	36.9	21.1	27.5	30.0	25.0
Attend/participate in NMSU events	29.2	33.3	23.7	29.0	26.3	42.1	20.0	45.0	25.0
To party	21.9	36.1	21.5	15.8	21.1	18.4	15.0	15.0	0.0
Friends at NMSU remained	20.8	13.9	20.4	13.2	24.6	26.3	22.5	35.0	25.0
Bad weather	20.5	19.4	25.9	18.4	26.3	13.2	17.5	15.0	8.3
Home too far away	16.2	13.9	18.3	23.7	12.3	18.4	10.0	15.0	25.0
Cost too much to go home	15.4	20.8	13.0	13.2	12.3	21.0	10.0	25.0	8.3
Nothing to do at home	13.5	19.4	8.6	18.4	12.3	7.9	20.0	10.0	8.3
Visit from boyfriend/girlfriend	12.4	8.3	15.1	5.3	19.3	5.3	17.5	15.0	8.3
Work	9.5	4.2	7.5	7.9	10.5	2.6	22.5	15.0	25.0
Other	8.9	4.2	6.5	13.2	10.5	23.7	5.0	10.0	0.0
Catch up on sleep	8.1	9.7	9.7	10.5	12.3	2.6	5.0	10.0	16.7
Unable to find ride	6.8	8.3	7.5	2.6	8.8	5.3	7.5	5.0	0.0
Visit from friends	3.0	5.6	1.1	5.3	3.5	0.0	2.5	5.0	0.0
Visit from family/relatives	1.4	1.4	2.1	0.0	1.8	0.0	2.5	0.0	0.0

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